



Op-Ed: Getting to the Win

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The Armed Forces that U.S. national leaders will have available to meet future contingencies and conflicts, in 2023 or 2029 for instance, will follow from U.S. strategic designs now being formulated. In September, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff released the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations: Joint Force 2020*, which sets out *globally integrated operations* as one such design. Such design concepts are informed by the imperfect calculations that we make about future threats and risks. At the forefront of those calculations—much like an integrating mathematical function—is concern about the nation’s fiscal environment and specifically the U.S. national debt, which will be a key driver in determining the size, composition, and mix of U.S. Armed Forces for the remainder of this decade, and longer. Fiscal considerations will also condition strategic decisions that will determine where and how U.S. Armed Forces are used, with both “upstream” and “downstream” influences on when and how often they will be used. The impact of the choices that are being made now, regarding the form and capabilities of U.S. Landpower, will persist through the first half of the 21st century, just like those decisions that were made in the late 1970s continue to permeate our Army platforms, systems, and organizations today.

The Army will make its design choices and recommendations within the framework of the *Prevent, Shape, Win* construct. Leaders will make the best possible estimates as to which tasks and for what purposes Joint Force and Army commanders will employ the land forces provided to them in accomplishing each specific, situation-driven definition of *Win*—from humanitarian assistance or peacekeeping, to gaining access and opening operational areas, to the destruction of opposing regular forces, to imposing defeat upon adversaries, to creating stability sufficient for a return to indigenous civil authority. The land forces executing these missions will be the *Army in*

Being. What those forces are capable of, and how quickly the Army can place and sustain them to accomplish a durable change in circumstances to the advantage of the United States and its partners are the choices of Joint force design, sizing, and composition that the nation is undertaking. There is substantial ambiguity that makes the best possible estimates, as has been the case so often in the past, inaccurate forecasts.

The Uncertainty: The capabilities and the perception of the capabilities of the *Army in Being* are important determinants in what exactly its existence *prevents*; what and how it *shapes* circumstances and events; and where, how, and what America must *win* through the use of its Armed Forces. With the projected return of U.S. land forces from Afghanistan in 2014 and absent another major commitment of ground troops before that occurs, for the first time in almost 15 years the U.S. will again have the full capacity of its Army held in potential.

Competitors of the United States will make strategic decisions based upon their perceptions of the capability of U.S. Landpower and of the willingness of the United States to use its Landpower. If these competitor nations believe that the United States is willing to employ its Landpower in such a manner as to permanently disadvantage or to damage the interests of other nations, these competitors may become adversaries or enemies.

Whatever the story we choose to tell ourselves about ourselves, competitors, and adversaries will, as Antulio J. Echevarria has recently noted, predict our likely responses based upon the long history of U.S. Presidents who chose “to employ only as much force as necessary, or no more than was politically and economically prudent.” These calculations of political and economic prudence were centered upon how much more capacity the United States had available for use, having applied the force thought necessary.

If an Army’s capacity to *win* whenever, wherever, and however called upon is well-known and indisputable, it can be used to *prevent* and to *shape* circumstances and courses of events effectively. Army Landpower that is capable of entering any point on land, of overcoming any and all opposition, and of remaining present for however long it takes to produce an outcome acceptable to the United States and its partners—months, years, or decades—achieves the construct of *prevent* through deterrence. And, if deterrence fails, then the work it has done to *shape* also contributes to the *win*. Given sufficient available strength, the Army can also create opportunities—through Security Assistance and Stability Operations activities—that remake

circumstances or put courses of events onto new paths that do not require “should deterrence fail” sequels. This is *shaping* that does its work to *prevent* by changing the game rather than through deterrence.

When the *Army in Being* does not have sufficient capacity held in potential to *win*, whether it is at work deterring or changing the game, the likelihood increases that the nation will have to rapidly and expensively create that capacity. Consequently, a rapidly expanded Army will then have to pursue a *win* construct, because adversaries will have already taken steps to act on the perceived weaknesses of the United States, perceived weaknesses that resulted from the United States having taken too-deep a cut, either in overall capacity (the path from World War II to Korea) or in functional capabilities that leave vulnerabilities exposed. Beyond 2014, the President will likely find that the decisions he must make on employing U.S. Armed Forces closely match the experience of his predecessors: which have, on average, involved committing U.S. Landpower to operations every 18 months. The Army he has available will affect when, where, and how he has to put service members in harm’s way.

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